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AN INTRODUCTION

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three years later. While it is extremely difficult to avoid use of this term, the information I have been able to gather from informants and other sources points inescapably to the conclusion that it is a misnomer.

To begin with, no one seems to know precisely what the term 'Mau Mau' means, as it has no accepted literal meaning in either Kikuyu or Swahili. Some suggest that it 'really' meant *Uma Uma* (Out, Out), referring to the African desire that Europeans leave Kenya, and was arrived at through a traditional children's game wherein the sounds of common words were transposed as in our own Pig-Latin.

A few informants have suggested that one of the defendants at the Naivasha Trial used the expression 'mumumumu' when referring to the whispered voices within the darkened oathing hut and that European journalists present thought he had said 'Mau Mau'. In a similar vein, Karari Njama has recently written informing me that...

After a long research I have come to the conclusion that the first African who disclosed the secrecy of the society at Naivasha police station told a European officer, 'I have been given *MUMA*', an oath. The European being neither able to pronounce nor spell *MUMA* correctly, created his own pronunciation... 'MAU MAU'. This error has happened more than a hundred times in this country, especially in the names of mountains, rivers and places. The correct name of Mt. Kenya is *Kirinyaga*. The Akamba people have neither the letter r nor g standing alone in their language and therefore their pronunciation for *Kirinyaga* is *Kiinyaa*, out of which the European, being unable to pronounce it, created *Kenya*.

Mr Njama goes on to indicate what he believes is a secondary meaning of the term 'Mau Mau', invented after the name had already become established. Here, the initials of the name are intended to stand for the Swahili words *Mzungu Arudi Uingereza, Mwafrika Apate Uhuru*, meaning, 'Let the European return to England and the African obtain his freedom'.

Perhaps the most plausible explanation regarding the origin of this term was given by another informant who said:

Mau mau was not a widely known word among Kikuyu. Its only meaning was 'greedy eating,' sometimes used by mothers to

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